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ABSTRACT

Freedom and accountability are not antithetical; they are equal elements and complementary principles in the educational equation to protect the productive pluralism of the student, the teacher, the administrator, and the institution. Pluralism is a critical value to be preserved and promoted through public policy decisions which emphasize freedom and independence. Educational institutions must receive the financial support necessary to maintain viable programs and to assure diversity, difference, and competition. The public has a right to know how public funds are being used to educate and to demand that the monies be spent wisely, but it does not have the right to interfere with basic principles of academic freedom and professional judgment. There must be educational accountability but business must not be the model. Educators' self-imposed model of accountability should focus on the outcome of the learning process as a developed value, the development of individual persons. The model might come from religion--an understanding of human relationships and performance of covenants. (Author/AG)

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ON THE FREEDOM TO BE ACCOUNTABLE

Freedom or accountability. Too often educators view academic freedom and public accountability as a mutually exclusive and equally destructive choice between the harsh alternatives of bankruptcy or castration. To choose freedom spells the loss of institutional funding. To choose accountability spells the imposition of public control.

Too infrequently do educators realize that freedom and accountability are not antithetical. Rather, they are equal elements and complementary principles in the educational equation to protect the productive pluralism of the student, the teacher, the administrator and the institution. In fact, I maintain, and it is my thesis, that only when educators define and implement an effective model of educational accountability can we expect to augment the creative pluralism of American education and the creative diversity of those it serves.

One word -- pluralism -- describes the single most significant characteristic of the "life style" of American society. Diversity in maximum measure, stimulation -- not just tolerance -- of difference, competition as the spur to excellence -- these have been the distinctive traits of the American "way".

So it has been also with American social institutions. Pluralism buttressed by diversity, difference and competition, has been the characteristic historically that has identified the healthy social institution. Homogeneity, sameness, a lack of competition have marked those social institutions "in trouble".

Education as a social institution is no exception. In fact, it is a prime, even classic example. As the Carnegie Commission has suggested recently it is no accident that higher education is in trouble at precisely that moment in history when the thrust is toward merger and homogeneity rather than unity and heterogeneity.

It is the premise of this paper that pluralism is a critical value to be preserved and promoted, that to do so requires positive public policy decisions and that such policies, to be successful, must place special emphasis on freedom and independence. It is the position of this paper, that pluralism in higher education requires public policy decisions providing educational institutions with financial support to assure their viability and program freedom to assure diversity, difference and competition.

It is not necessary to look far for support of either the premise or the position. In fact, our coins carry the phrase that "says it all" -- E Pluribus Unum. The "E", more accurately "ex" or "out of" is the key. It represents the critical factor linking our social institutions to the maintenance of a vital national life; it indicates the reciprocal relationships between the many and the one; it suggests the strength derived from diversity developed in unity.

The Congress of the United States, in the 1972 Educational Amendments (S122(a)(1)(A)) has recognized that higher education constitutes a "natural resource which significantly contributes to the security, general welfare and economy." The national commitment to pluralistic higher education is based upon a conviction that the public good is best served by a system featuring free choice, wholesome competition, a rich variety of educational options and freedom to be accountable to educational rather than political pressures.

So much for discussion and documentation of the premise. Two requirements result. First, the decision to extend public resources in support of educational institutions is made more complex by the equally compelling requirement that such aid must be made available under conditions that do not diminish the value sought, viz. the freedom and independence of colleges and universities.

Second, there is a special need for policy decisions assuring program freedom to institutions of higher education. Program freedom in many ways is a more critical need than dollars. The educational institutions' traditional responsiveness to the needs of society, the local community it serves, or its students cannot be encumbered without threatening the special nature, diversity and very existence of the American college or university. Limitations on program freedom result in diminished diversity, handicap the design and development of a unique institutional character and thereby are counter productive. Financial support alone is an incomplete response, therefore, to the challenge of sustaining pluralism. In fact, such support could be linked to control or "accountability" mechanisms designed by agencies or authorities external to the educational community. Under such conditions the freedom and independence fundamental to assure diversity would be reduced or removed.

Fear that funding means program control and mechanical accountability is legitimate. If our concern is that the political community will dictate academic perspectives which must be taught; if accountability spells suppression of professional judgment, freedom to teach and freedom to learn, then our concern is justified.

The public does have a right to know. It should demand that tax dollars are not spent frivolously. It has the right to understand how public resources are being used to educate. But the public does not have the right to interfere with basic principles of academic freedom and professional judgment.

If a system of accountability geared to educational goals and process is not designed, educators, by default, will be confronted by a system geared to assembly line process and designed on the efficiency objectives of the big business model. Such a system, imposed from without, will focus on the student as a commodity and shift the accountability for "production" from the student to the school. Efficiency would be stressed, results would be measured numerically per unit cost and the educator would be "graded" in terms of quantative output. National definitions would replace individual student aspirations. We would move from Aristotle to Plato.

The result of applying business-industrial techniques to education in 1915 was that learning objectives became subordinate to business considerations; that administrators were produced who were not, in any true sense, educators; that a scientific label was put on some very unscientific and dubious methods and practices; and that an anti-intellectual climate already prevalent was strengthened. To repeat this mistake will attract at best bureaucratic plumbers and educational eunuchs to prostitute again educational leadership. At worst, it will encourage unethical conduct and corrupt behavior.

It is unnecessary to invoke a Washington scene to see this prophecy fulfilled. Higher education already has its own national Watergate. In the absence of an athletic accountability model designed and supported by educators, colleges and universities have bought the big business model emphasizing only efficiency and goals imposed from outside education by entertainment interests -- and all of this with public consent and approval. The coach is graded "by the numbers" in units of wins and losses. The student athlete is a commodity that is bought and sold. Most are disillusioned. Many are dehumanized. Some are brutalized. Not as many as could be actually are corrupted -- all this with the knowledge, the funding and the blessing of higher education.

Witness the page one, New York Times story of Monday, March 11, headlined "Costly Business of Sports Recruiting Escalates Toward a Public Scandal."

"From the Big Ten to Slippery Rock, the savage cost of winning has plunged America's intercollegiate sports programs into an economic and moral crisis of major proportions. In the big-business atmosphere of college sports, solvency and survival are linked to victory.

"Brown University, a relatively 'pure' Ivy League college with an annual sports deficit of $650,000, fired its hockey coach in mid-season last month for what the Athletic Director called, 'loss of control over the players.' The team had a record of five won and 10 lost, and the deposed coach...insisted he had been told, '....its the Ws and Ls that count.' 'I'm sorry.'"

Sorry is the best description of the intercollegiate sports scene and the present big business model of athletic accountability. Quantitative units, measured in wins and losses, imposed from without because of the absence of educational creativity and courage, have destroyed a potential, creative learning opportunity.

The challenge then is clear. There must be educational accountability but business must not be the model. The learning process of higher education cannot survive a multiplicity of quantitative exercises such as reporting the mathematical level and the verbal level of SAT's at entrance and each year thereafter and even at graduation in order to justify itself. There appears to be only one approach available to deal with the dilemma, since none of the previous statements is intended to deny the validity of the principle of accountability. A viable educational policy stance could result from recognition that 1) each educational institution has a stake in preserving maximum program freedom while receiving support adequate to assure viability; and 2) accountability systems must feature self-regulation

and qualitative effectiveness measured against educational goals rather than quantitative efficiency. Program freedom could be made subject, in addition to accrediting mechanisms, to a regular monitoring and evaluation system developed and administered by the institutions themselves. Self regulation is the only sound method of maximizing freedom and financial support.

The purposes of education are comprehensive and very complex. Educational objectives differ from student to student. Different professors have different skills which they are attempting to develop. Do the art and philosophy professors measure success the same way? The same is true of administrators. They have and ought to have a wide diversity of important objectives and professional duties. The registrar cannot be measured by the same criteria as the counselor. Surely we would not place the President and the graduate Teaching Assistant against the same yardstick.

The purpose of accountability is to help all of us create a better self. Evaluation of students is to help them better understand their strengths and weaknesses. Review of the faculty is intended to upgrade the quality of teaching. Accountability of administrators should be designed to make their operation more effective and responsive.

But the criteria of accountability cannot be uniform if they are truly to evaluate the qualitative contribution of each segment of higher education. We cannot afford to yield to the tendency to "measure", to settle for a quantitative efficiency-oriented approach -- in the classroom or the faculty and administrative office. The only way out of the quagmire of homogeneity is the development of specific individualized criteria for qualitative accountability.

Educators must take advantage of the present freedom to design a self-imposed model of accountability. It must stress effectiveness rather than efficiency. It should focus on the

outcome of the learning process as a developed value rather than as a marketable commodity. It should be designed to accommodate the individual on the local campus rather than the abstracted group on the national scene. The model should have the ring of authority -- a word whose Latin origin defines its real meaning as an ability to make people grow. In effect the educator is an artist creating something of value. The primary concern of the model adopted by educators must always be the fulfillment of individual human beings rather than the fulfillment of managerial concepts. Such a model cannot come from business. It could come from religion.

In the biblical view education is a matter of interpersonal engagement and formal commitment between persons. Human being is held to be, in its very nature, dialogic; it emerges only in a responsive I-Thou relation. Human being is also historical; its very texture and substance is activity in time. It follows, therefore, that knowledge that really touches the humanness of man can be communicated properly, not through the abstract concept of the Greeks, but through man's living word and deed. That, in turn, means personal engagement and commitment. To what extent this is possible in a highly structured educational process constitutes the fundamental problem for the design of an effective accountability model.

When education is depersonalized and objectified, as it more or less must be as soon as it is institutionalized, knowledge and culture become external, something to be possessed, enjoyed, utilized rather than something that brings with it a call to commitment and decision. Sir Walter Moberly noted that "most students go through our universities without ever having been forced to exercise their minds on the issues that are really momentous."

This is not merely the fault of curriculum or teaching methods. It is, at bottom, a protective device. To avoid accountability man seeks to elaborate, to externalize, to

objectify knowledge and thus keep at a safe distance the call to commitment that comes to him through what he learns and knows. Education under such conditions becomes a way of avoiding real accountability to our fellow man -- even more to ourselves. This is the most subtle peril to which education is exposed. It is clear that unless some sort of personal engagement and commitment is achieved, there can be no real education in humanness.

If education buys the biblical view of the learning process as personal engagement it must adopt the biblical model of accountability -- the covenant of performance between persons.

A performance covenant denies the applicability of uniform standards and goals to diversity of individuals or to the plurality of institutions. A performance covenant affirms that there are consistent principles applicable throughout the national community of higher education.

The first principle might be that everyone in the university is accountable for their activities -- from the President to the freshman.

A second principle might be that everyone should participate in the formulation of his "performance covenant" in order to make a real contract.

Third, formulation of general goods should include wide participation from those affected.

Fourth, evaluation criteria should be broad-based and inclusive of subjective measurement.

Fifth, to make a performance judgment solely on output without adjusting the results expected to the matrix of the inputs is unfair and counter productive.

Accountability through performance covenants would involve three steps.

1. Agreeing formally what we are going to do -- setting specific goals mutually acceptable to both persons.

2. Doing it.

3. Explaining that we have accomplished what we agreed to do.

In the decade ahead the performance covenant model will humanize such pressing agenda items as: 1) equal access for minorities and women as students and employees; 2) cost regulations; 3) managerial efficiency; 4) codification of internal decision-making process; 5) behavioral accountability -- the outcomes of learning; 6) relevance of managerial technologies; 7) centralizing management while decentralizing educational function; and 8) authorship of learning material and use of learning hardware.

To return to the first line of this paper as a route to the "bottom line," the choice is not between accountability and freedom. Neither is it between accountability and no accountability. Accountability is a given. The decision to be made involves the issue of whether or not freedom to be accountable will be preserved. If the choice is made to exercise current freedom, to take the initiative, to design a self-regulatory model of accountability, utilizing educational goals as a reference point and qualitative evaluation of effectiveness in achieving those objectives as the criteria -- then freedom will be protected.

What about the alternative? What happens if we "sit on our hands?" What if we continue to permit the intrusion of the business model as in such instances as the present athletic accountability disaster? What if we deny the validity of the thesis of this paper and opt instead to "enjoy" the imposition of accountability since we cannot prevent it? What happens is an early arrival of 1984.

It should be no surprise that the calendar certifies we have entered the decade of 1984, that we have only ten years to go before the Orwell prophecy can be checked. What

may have gone unnoticed are the signs of a possible early arrival of that 1984 world. What prompts such pessimism? The conditions requiring a discussion on how to preserve the freedom to be accountable are almost signal enough. But there are many others. Let me share one or two examples with you.

In Washington two weeks ago a newspaper photo of a kindergarten student at a computer terminal caught my attention. The "cut" line reports, with pride, that "by 1978" such resources would be available to all primary grade youngsters. Imagine such an extension of technology with its potential for abuse through programmed instruction, add our having not discovered the Watergate infection, mix well with the financial distress of non-public schools and you have a fine recipe for early arrival of 1984.

Or think for a moment about the seductive logic of Professor Stanley Surrey, writing about federal income tax reform. Dr. Surrey argues that charitable deductions are public money, that they would otherwise be collected as taxes, that they are used at private discretion and without appropriation by a proper legislative authority. He refers to such deductions as "tax expenditures" and proposes that they be replaced by publicly appropriated funds. The problem with that position is clear, but becomes even more obvious when the principle is generalized. On the one hand implementation of such an approach reduces the opportunity to promote pluralism currently available and independent of political pressure. At the ultimate the principle provides the "case" for the government to decide that all income tax and "it" -- the government -- will decide not only what is good and efficient for the public, but also for the individual.

So much for the pessimistic prospect of 1984's early arrival. The real message of this paper is optimistic. We did discover the Watergate infection and will eventually find

the proper medication; there is still time for us to choose the performance covenant model; quality rather than quantity, effectiveness rather than efficiency can still be our choice. Most important, we also still have political and educational institutions that, with proper leadership, can implement the role of government in these matters forecast by that optimist Thoreau as follows:

> Yet this government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. It does not keep the country free. It does not settle the west. It does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in the way.